



## NJDOE News

### ADVISORY

In light of the rapidly evolving events in the Middle East, the New Jersey Department of Education is re-posting remarks made on March 7 by Commissioner of Education William L. Librera at a conference entitled Homeland Security: Bridging the Communication Gap conference. His remarks contain advice for schools as the nation remains on high-alert status.

In addition, the Department of Education is again posting a link to a Web-site launched earlier this month by the federal Department of Education and the federal Department of Homeland Security. The link is:

[www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/](http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/)

**COMMISSIONER WILLIAM L. LIBRERA'S REPORT**  
**Presented at the Conference on**  
**Homeland Security: Bridging the Communication Gap Conference**  
**Kean University**  
**March 7, 2003**

#### Introduction

- We in the education community see ourselves as an important part of disaster preparedness and response and of bridging the communication gap. As we all remember, on September 11, 2001, the children – both those most directly affected by the loss of a family member, as well as those affected as members of the general public -- were in school.
- In view of the federal government's recent announcement of the Code Orange designation for terrorist threats, it can be helpful to understand that Code Orange is primarily intended to heighten the level of alert and activity on the part of security and law enforcement personnel. While the New Jersey Homeland Security Office has indicated that there is no reason for special action on the part of schools at this time, it is important for schools to review their readiness to respond to any type of emergency or crisis.
- Since September 11, we have all been educated about responding to the needs of children and adults, and in preparing for the future. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to review school obligations and share with you some of the initiatives that we in the Department of Education have undertaken to meet these challenges.

#### Regulations for Emergency and Crisis Management Plans

- Each district board of education is required to establish plans, procedures and mechanisms for responding to emergencies and crises.
- Since the district plans, procedures and mechanisms must be developed in consultation with law enforcement agencies, health and social services agencies and emergency management planners, schools have been reminded to reach out to these collaborative partners to confirm existing plans and share relevant information.
- Districts are also reminded of their obligations to ensure that all district staff are prepared to recognize and appropriately respond to crises, consistent with the district's plans, procedures and mechanisms for managing crises, and that the training programs for district staff must be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

#### Related Regulations

- New regulations addressing school safety, violence, substance abuse and health services were adopted by the State Board of Education in April 2001.
- A discussion paper proposing the development of regulations on student discipline has been approved by the State Board of Education and will be published for public comment in early March 2003.

## Supportive Resources

- Schools may want to review the New Jersey Department of Education's publication titled *A Guide for the Development of a Districtwide School Safety Plan*, which includes a section on school building emergency and crisis management planning. A copy of this document has been provided to each school district and is available on the department's Web site.
- The department has also developed a *Resource Manual for Intervention and Referral Services*. This publication provides guidance for schools to implement building-based problem-solving teams, as required in the regulations that are established to identify and remediate academic, behavior and health problems at early stages of identification.
- Additional information and resources on crisis management and prevention and intervention programs can be found at the United States Department of Education's Web site.

## Policy

- As required under the anti-bullying, harassment and intimidation statute enacted in September 2002, the department has developed and published on its Web site a *Model Policy Prohibiting Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying on School Property, at School-sponsored Functions and on School Buses*.
- To comply with the Unsafe School Choice Option Policy requirement in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the department is developing a policy that will permit within-district transfers for students attending persistently dangerous schools and students who are victims of violent criminal offenses. The policy will be finalized and disseminated to districts in May 2003 for implementation in September 2003.

## Programs

The department has implemented a variety of initiatives intended to reduce violence and other at-risk student behaviors, as well as to bolster our homeland preparedness:

- Schools in South Jersey were the sites for distribution of Potassium Iodide pills, which were made available to New Jersey residents who live within ten miles of nuclear reactors. Our New Jersey AmeriCorps program, which is hosted by the Department of Education, assisted with the Potassium Iodide distribution, and also assisted with logistics at New Jersey's first smallpox "vaccinate the vaccinators" clinic.
- In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, we worked with the U.S. Department of Education to make available special funding to local education agencies, including Charter Schools that were impacted by the attack on the World Trade Center. The School Emergency Response to Violence program (Project SERV) under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act provided education-related services to LEAs in which the learning environment had been impacted by these violent, traumatic events. Resources were used to assist children in the short and long term.
- Over \$8,200,000 in federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act funds has been provided to schools in the 2002-2003 school year to support locally-determined violence and substance abuse prevention and intervention program activities.
- The Intervention and Referral Services Initiative, which provides training and materials to building-based problem-solving teams.
- Showcasing of Exemplary and Promising Practices, in which program sponsors from the Exemplary Practices list developed by the United States Department of Education's Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Expert Panel will be invited to showcase their programs for new Jersey educators at a one-day conference in May 2003. The proceedings will be videotaped and disseminated to all school districts.
- In January 2002, the department developed and disseminated for review a revised version of the New Jersey Comprehensive Health Education and Physical Education Curriculum Framework to support the Health, Safety and Physical Education Core Curriculum Content Standards.
- Safe Schools and Communities Violence Prevention and Intervention Response Pilot Plan Initiative, which piloted a comprehensive planning process for school crises. A report of findings from the pilot program will be distributed to schools in the spring of 2003.
- The Children We Share: Principals and Parents Promoting Youth Development and Discipline Initiative, under which manuals, CD-ROMS and videotape programs, which include guidance and research on effective discipline and youth development practices, were provided to all New Jersey principals.

- Youth Gang Prevention and Intervention Project, which is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Education and the Juvenile Justice Commission, designed to provide gang prevention and intervention curricula to juveniles, a statewide conference on gang issues and a public speakers service on gang topics.
- Juvenile Offender Reentry Project, which is a collaborative initiative among the department, the State Parole Board and the Juvenile Justice Commission, designed to provide support to students reentering their communities from juvenile facilities.
- V-Free Initiative, in which the Department of Education is supporting the efforts of the Department of State to provide seed funds to students for grassroots violence prevention activities.\_
- Peer-to-Peer Transitions Project, which is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Senior Services in which students are provided support in their transitions from middle schools to high schools.
- Student Support Services Planning and Development Initiative, which is designed to provide support to thirteen districts who have applied to refine or reform their student support services programs. Exemplary work products resulting from the initiative will be showcased statewide.
- New Jersey Student Health Survey done in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Senior Services and Law and Public Safety, the department is developing and administering a new survey that will consolidate four existing student surveys to yield one set of middle school and high school student health data.
- Plans are under way to implement services and resources to aid schools in organizing Community Service for Suspended and Expelled Students.

### **Future Plans**

- Planning is under way to address the recommendations of the student discipline policy forums conducted in the fall of 2001, which include the following: development of regulations, guidance documents and publications, provision of training and technical assistance, increased interagency and intra-agency collaboration and convening an advisory panel to consider consistent uses of alternative education policies and programs for general education students who are suspended or expelled from school.
- The Department of Education is part of our State's Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force, which was convened by Governor McGreevey, and which is chaired by the Office of the Attorney-General. The charge to this group is to prepare operational continuity plans for all state agencies. We have undertaken security surveys of all DOE facilities. State government staff has participated in table top exercises related to smallpox and bioterrorism. And we receive guidance on responding to the various threat response alert levels (the color coding) that is promulgated by the federal Homeland Security Department. As this planning goes forward, schools will be a focus of attention, both in providing shelter for families, and in planning for bioterrorist response. To enhance communications, we have invited representatives of the Department of Health and Senior Services to provide a briefing for the County Superintendents on bioterrorism. We are also working with school nurses, who are an important part of the health response system.
- We are also encouraging outreach to the school community as plans move forward to establish Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs) in each of the 21 counties. The VOADs bring together the Offices of Emergency Management, the Red Cross and other disaster response agencies, human services organizations, faith-based groups, animal shelters, food banks, and bilingual services. Key leaders of the state VOAD are your neighbors - Cathy McCann of the NJ Community Food Bank in Hillside and Brenda Beavers of the Salvation Army in Union.
- Finally, I am proud that our state AmeriCorps program has received one of 16 national Homeland Security grants. The New Jersey Secure Corps will deploy 20 members into the counties to assist in the development of the VOADs and will work closely with the County Offices of Emergency Management.
- Our message is a positive one. Though the issues that lie before us are complex and troubling, through education we can prepare ourselves and the wider public to be engaged, prepared, and helpful. I also believe that young people can and should be involved in community activities. Through education; through communication; and by taking action together we can get beyond the fears that we may be experiencing and move forward in America's spirit of service, citizenship, and responsibility.